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Good literature can be a source for examples of problem-solving approaches that expose students to confident and effective conflict resolution strategies. By analyzing literary figures and their problem-solving approaches in a reflective manner, teachers encourage students to apply such techniques in their own complex circumstances. Regarding literature, Stephens (1989, p. 585-586) queried, "Shouldn't the books children read today reinforce the traits they are developing which will help them cope with their adult problems and become healthy, successful adults?"

Perspectives in children's literature

Considering the use of books to promote personal growth and social responsibility, Shannon (1986) classified favorite children's stories as having individualistic, collectivistic, or balanced social perspectives. Shannon determined books in the study were predominantly individualistic in that characters pursue their own personal goals. Shannon characterized collectivism by an all for one and one for all attitude, but did not find this to be the orientation of any of the books studied. One book did evidence a balanced perspective because it promoted self-development in the context of a social conscience. Shannon observed that often "the authors distinguished the main characters

from their social context and had them seek to solve individual problems" (p. 661). Adolescence is often a time of alienation, when children feel alone in the struggle to leave childhood behind and gradually seek acceptance into the adult world. Many children's books present misunderstood youngsters facing conflicts alone. The orientation to conflict resolution in many of these stories is individualistic. Feeling alone with their problems, heroes commonly grapple with reaching a solution by themselves.

Table 1

Problem-solving perspectives of protagonists in selected Newbery Medal Books, 1965-1990

Year	*Title*	*Problem-Solving Perspective*	
		Individual	Cooperative
1990	*Number the Stars*		x
1988	*Lincoln: A Photobiography*		x
1987	*The Whipping Boy*	x.....	
1986	*Sarah, Plain and Tall*		x
1984	*Dear Mr. Henshaw*		x
1983	*Dicey's Song*		x
1981	*Jacob I Have Loved*	x	
1980	*A Gathering of Days*		x
1978	*Bridge to Terebithia*	x.....	
1977	*Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*		x
1975	*M.C. Higgins, The Great*	x.....	
1974	*The Slave Dancer*	x.....	
1973	*Julie of the Wolves*	x	
1972	*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*		x
1971	*The Summer of the Swans*	x.....	
1970	*Sounder*	x.....	
1968	*From the Mixed-up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler*		x
1967	*Up a Road Slowly*	x	
1966	*I, Juan de Pareja*	x.....	
1965	*Shadow of a Bull*	x.....	
	Totals	11	9

... Shows changes in perspective

A recent study focusing on problem-solving perspectives of protagonists in Newbery Medal books of the last 25

years observed a different metamessage (Mohr, 1991). The study consisted of categorization of conflicts and analysis of problem-solving perspectives of protagonists in selected Newbery winners. Main characters in nearly half of these stories manifest a cooperative perspective toward their conflicts (Mohr, p. 33). Of the remaining 55 percent, characters in eight of the stories initially hold an individualistic perspective but alter their approach by the story's end. The main characters learn to cooperate with others or receive help from others in seeking resolution to conflicts. As shown in Table 1, only three of the 20 books present a protagonist in conflict who remains a strongly individualistic problem-solving perspective. The metamessage to readers is that "It's okay to seek help." Several books show cooperation and support primarily between two characters. These protagonists discover that by sharing their struggles, they achieve resolution and friendship. Although learning to work together to solve problems can at first be distasteful, willing and unwilling participants gradually realize the value of working with others and gain strength, camaraderie, and direction in the process.

Cooperative problem solving

Conflicts include choices. One choice a person in conflict can make is whether to seek help from others. Many children are growing up in our culture feeling alone and misunderstood. They can be discouraged from seeking the help of significant adults in their lives. Heins (1986) asserts that recent adolescent literature has vividly presented this aspect of the generation gap (pp. 333-334). The role of adults is often central to conflicts of children's literature, but adults are often depicted as the source of conflict rather than facilitators in resolution. Other studies (Egoff, 1981; Millett, 1979) confirm that the role of adults in contemporary children's literature is less friend than foe. Some parents in

stories studied appear to love passively but do not really understand the struggles of their children nor take an active role in resolving conflicts. Without help, youngsters can be crippled by conflicts. Fear often causes doubt and in such circumstances, children need reassurance. Are children expected merely to adapt? How many adults can individually resolve their own conflicts successfully, much less children? Rather than assume young people will find direction, successfully overcoming their problems, parents and adults can help. Teachers, too, can facilitate the use of better problem-solving heuristics. Careful use of books in classroom discussion should communicate the message implicitly or explicitly that one need not seek resolution alone.

Adult problem-solving behaviors observed in award-winning literature include helping to recognize and define the problem, providing some perspective to the problem, assisting the prioritizing of responses to the problem, and facilitating the problem-solving processes involved in conflict resolution. Realistic conflicts commonly involve sacrifices, compromises, and loose ends. Adults (in life and in books) can model maintaining a proper perspective in such circumstances. Despite necessary sacrifices, children should be encouraged to effect at least a temporary, or at times an imperfect resolution. In addition, adults can and need to help children recognize that some problems are too big — that they are in a sense unresolvable. In Voigt's (1982) *Dicey's Song*, Dicey's acknowledgement of a certain helplessness is more palatable due to Gram's supportive and cooperative concern. Gram helps Dicey to realize that in some instances, mere recognition of a problem is a major step in reconciliation and that resolution is sometimes beyond one's reach. As Blos' (1979) character, Catherine (*A Gathering of Days*), summarizes, "this year, more than the others has been a lengthy gathering of days wherein we

lived, we loved, were moved, learned to accept" (p. 140). Learning when to accept and when to act are choices that adults can facilitate.

Instructional opportunities

In several Newbery Medal stories, protagonists seem to get lost in their troubles and do not know how to find their way out. By sharing their worries, characters are shown to learn that bewilderment is common in the teenage years. Alienation and confusion, although common, can be ameliorated when others help in the growing-up process. Emotional responses can be replaced with more mature responses. Teachers often hope that student readers will be able to identify with the emotions of the main characters. Do teachers also use books that communicate the value of reaching-out behaviors in dealing with emotional situations? Ideally, young people can observe adults in successful problem-solving situations. But books can also provide varied conflicts and problem-solving responses available for vicarious analysis. Teachers can play a part in this process. Shannon contends that "part of a teacher's task is to help children perceive what books are saying both directly and indirectly" (p. 656). Classroom literature-based programs should include analysis of the consequences of seeking resolution alone or with the help of others. Focusing on books whose adolescent protagonists reform their problem-solving perspectives from individualistic to cooperative can encourage the benefits of a social perspective.

Although adolescents in this culture tend to seek independence, books can demonstrate that some problems are large enough and important enough to solicit help in resolving. As Gram relates to Dicey (*Dicey's Song*), "You have to reach out to people. To your family too. If they slap it back, well you reach out again if you care enough" (p. 128).

Although an individualistic approach may be typical, providing students with a range of approaches serves to expand their problem-solving options. In today's complex, global community, adolescents must be encouraged to leave the egocentrism of childhood behind and approach problems in a cooperative manner. Paradigms presented in literature demonstrate the needs for and crucial elements of sociocentric problem-solving to children who may well have to employ cooperative strategies to solve far-reaching social concerns in their futures. Classroom analysis of good children's literature can facilitate effective problem-solving skills of future citizens. To consider the metamessage of cooperation as well as the individualistic perspective in such analyses would be well worth the time and effort. There are award-winning books that speak to the consequences of both individualistic and cooperative problem solving. Teachers must give heed to both voices.

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